

I. Project Title and Project Purpose Statement

Project Title: North Gulfport Water Quality Education and Leadership Development Program

Project Description: The Steps Coalition (Steps) proposes an education and leadership development program that seeks to improve the water quality of Turkey Creek and connected waterways and to mitigate the effects of climate change for nearby communities. Steps proposes to achieve this goal by 1) educating nearby communities of storm water pollution prevention, improving water quality in Turkey Creek watershed, and wetland preservation and by 2) identifying and training leaders within the community to engage in a variety of activities that will improve water quality of Turkey Creek and connected waterways and the climate resiliency of nearby communities.

Location: North Gulfport, Mississippi

Environmental Statute: Clean Water Act Section 104(b) (3)

Climate Resiliency Focus: The program seeks to mitigate the affects of climate change by educating the public and implementing community driven strategies to preserve and improve the health of nearby wetlands and the Turkey Creek watershed and consequently, its connected waterways.

II. Environmental, Public Health and Community Climate Resiliency Information

The Turkey Creek Watershed is in Harrison County Mississippi and largely in the city of Gulfport. The affected environmental justice communities in the Turkey Creek Watershed are North Gulfport, Forest Heights, Soria City, Villa del Rey, Rippy Road, and others. These communities are predominately low income and African American. Communities in the Turkey Creek Watershed are in low-lying coastal areas and near bodies of water. They are especially vulnerable to hurricanes and tropical storms that will continue to increase in number and strength as a result of climate change.

Historically, the North Gulfport community was entirely self-reliant. Community members lived off the land by fishing in the Turkey Creek, hunting wildlife in the nearby forests, and tending to their gardens. As industry moved to the area locals took jobs at the nearby Creosote plant. Later, when men left the community to seek better opportunities, their wives worked together by taking care of each other's children, sharing food stores and working communally on agricultural plots. As the city of Gulfport moved through the 20th century, this community remained isolated, leaving it underrepresented and underdeveloped in the outside world. Basic services like sewage and trash removal were almost non-existent and today remain absent in many parts of the community. Over the past twenty years, urban land parcels in the North Gulfport community have become vacant and overgrown while nearby development is rapidly filling the surrounding wetlands. A significant number of developable lots exist within the neighborhoods, but more often than not forests are cut down and wetlands filled and potential infill constraints, like scattered-site development, are left unaddressed.

Green infrastructure, such as healthy wetlands and waterways, and improving stormwater management practices have traditionally been the best flood protection for these underserved communities. Thus, this project seeks to address the resiliency of communities living near the Turkey Creek watershed by educating residents about the issues, the causes and solutions, and providing tools to empower them to take action. The results of their collective action in turn will lead to increased protection and improvement in the health of Turkey Creek watershed; improvement in the management of wetlands; improvement in the health of local waterways, and a reduction in the amount of floodwaters and the level of toxicity of floodwaters reaching peoples homes during natural disasters. These improvements will consequently improve the resiliency of the Gulfport communities most vulnerable to climate change.

III. Organization's Historical Connection to the Affected Community

Steps works closely with the Turkey Creek communities. In 2009 the Steps Coalition launched the *Partners for a Safe and Health Port Campaign* after hosting community informational meetings in response to the governor's reallocation of disaster funding from the Katrina housing block grant to fund the *Port of the Future*. The campaign objectives included: 1) identifying the geographic footprint of the proposed "Port of the Future" and its impact on communities health, environment, housing, economy, and historic neighborhood; 2) working with Gulfport residents to establish common goals for how this large scale development will interact with their community; and 3) ensuring residents impacted by the expansion were engaged in the planning process. As part of the community outreach for the campaign, Steps funded a documentary, *Aboveboard Port of the Future*. *Aboveboard* traces the evolution of the grassroots-led advocacy campaign that, over time, brought about important changes in jobs, environmental justice, and community engagement in the largest single public infrastructure investment in Mississippi history. Through interviews with a wide range of voices from Governor Phil Bryant to local community activists, *Aboveboard* details the ways in which local voices are lifted up to ensure that the State met its promises to the Gulf Coast. The documentary premiered in 2013 and since then has been shown throughout the community on several different occasions. The most recent showing was held January 8, 2015 at the University of Southern Mississippi Film Festival as part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Coastwide Celebration.

In December 2011, the Partners for a safe and Healthy Port Campaign was formalized as the Port Campaign Coalition (PCC) with key community stakeholders signing an operating agreement that provides a formal structure for decision making and gives community leaders access to attorney-client privileged documents. Steps Coalition provides administrative and organizing support to the Port Campaign Coalition. The PCC is especially concerned with the economic and environmental justice issues related to the port expansion. Plans to expand included building two inland port roads that require 162 acres of wetlands to be filled and cut through the historic communities of North Gulfport. As a result of efforts of the PCC, the road expansion has been delayed for now. However, this and many other issues require the PCC to remain engaged. Thus, Steps continues to provide administrative and organizing support to the coalition. Steps also continues to support and coordinate with the members of the PCC around other activities including local

community organizing workshops, fundraising events, Steps' annual strategic planning sessions, and community events, such as MLK events.

Howard Page, Steps Community Organizer, has also worked closely with North Gulfport communities prior to 2009. Howard served on the Turkey Creek Watershed Strategic Planning Team. With funding assistance from the EPA Region IV, the team produced a report in 2006, *The Watershed Implementation Plan*. The plan outlined actions the public and private sectors can take to protect the Turkey Creek Watershed. The plan includes a broad scope of strategies and activities that can be done. Since 2006, however, little action has been taken. Steps proposes a program that will give individuals living and/or working with people living in the Turkey Creek communities the opportunity to engage in number of activities, including ones outlined in the *Watershed Implementation Plan*. The program Steps proposes here is intentionally designed to be community driven, giving those living in the area ownership of the types of activities that will be done to protect the watershed and nearby wetlands. The Water Quality Education and Leadership Development Program not only educates the community about the problems and solutions but also provides the community with the tools and resources to increase their own capacity to take action. Participants will be able to use the skills they learn through this program to continue to take action in the future. Accomplishing the goals of this program requires long term commitment and continued effort on the part of the communities living near the Turkey Creek Watershed. Thus, Steps feels it is vitally important to give ownership of the work to the community and to empower the communities with the leadership skills needed to continue to carry out the worthwhile work beyond the scope of this program. This has proven to be an effective strategy in the past with our coalitions, such as the PCC, and continues to be the way Steps works with communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

IV. Project Description

This project seeks to prevent further degradation of the Turkey Creek watershed, protect nearby wetlands from over development, and reduce overall toxic pollution from both point and non-point sources. Steps proposes to achieve this goal by empowering and educating the community through the creation of a North Gulfport Water Quality Education and Leadership Development Program that will target individuals living and/or working with communities in the Turkey Creek watershed. Steps will identify and train 10-16 individuals to develop and implement education campaigns and/or initiatives that seek to meet project goals. The leadership development program will help each participant understand the problem, identify strategies for addressing the problem, and provide resources for creating and implementing education campaigns and initiatives. Following the training, participants will receive funding to implement their individual and/or collective plan(s). Steps will monitor participants' activity throughout the year and provide needed support for their efforts. Participants will reconvene to reassess the challenges and accomplishments over the course of the year, identify additional strategies for continued work, and plan a fundraising activity to support their efforts.

Objective 1: Identify 10-16 individuals to participate in the Water Quality Education and Leadership Development Program.

Activities:

- 1) Create selection committee to identify participants. The selection committee will be responsible for creating and application, criteria for selecting participants, and criteria for funding proposals. The selection committee is needed because the participants will be given the option to implement their work plans developed during the training and thus, must demonstrate the ability to lead a small project/campaign and live or serve in the affected community.
- 2) Recruit applicants by leveraging current partnerships, meeting with local organizations, churches, and schools, and advertising opportunity on Steps weekly Eblast and other media sources.

Responsible Parties: Steps will invite 4 members of organizations serving the Turkey Creek communities to serve on the selection committee. The selection committee will include these four members and Steps' Executive Director, Roberta Avila. Together the committee will create an application and criteria for selecting applicants for the program. The program management team, Steps staff, Howard Page, and North Gulfport Community Land Trust Executive Director (NGCLT), Rose Johnson, and committee members will be responsible for recruiting applicants from their respective networks and the Turkey Creek community in general. Steps staff will also provide administrative support for outreach to recruit participants. This will include creating fliers, notifying media, sending emails, etc.

Objective 2: Develop training module that will prepare residents to lead their own community education campaigns and/or effectively implement activities that seek to address program goals. The training module will include but is not limited to the following topics:

- History of Turkey Creek watershed and its connectivity to other waterways
- Clean Water Act
- Benefits of healthy watersheds
- Point and non-point pollution sources
- Strategies for reducing pollution
- Best stormwater management practices
- Designing, implementing, and evaluating education campaigns and activities/programs for improving water quality

Activities:

- 1) Coordinate with diverse group of stakeholders that have knowledge and experience with stormwater pollution prevention, the Turkey Creek watershed, and/or wetland preservation and climate resiliency activities in Harrison County. Steps has previously worked with several individuals, community organizations, and government agencies around these issues and will invite them to share their knowledge and expertise with participants and/or serve on the program development committee.
- 2) Incorporate EPA resources on watershed campaigns and stormwater education into training and a resource guidebook for participants to use to design community driven action plans to achieve the goals of the program. The following is a starting list of resources Steps will use to develop training guides for participants and assist in the development of the education campaigns and/or initiatives:

- Getting In Step: A Guide for Conducting Watershed Campaigns
- Stormwater Education Toolkit
- Getting In Step: Engaging Stakeholders in Your Watershed
- Healthy Watersheds Initiative: National Framework and Action Plan

3) Identify education campaigns, activities and programs for improving water quality. This list will serve as a guide for participants to develop their own campaigns and initiatives.

The following is a working list of ideas to be incorporated in training:

- Neighborhood non-point sources pollution prevention education campaign
- Toxic-free schools, businesses, and/or government buildings
- Hazardous waste collection events
- Water quality education lesson plans for teachers
- Stenciling storm drains project
- Civic engagement activities, such as serving as voice for community for promoting green infrastructure, protecting nearby wetlands from over development, or improving and enforcing best stormwater management practices
- Creek and/or Water Keeper program
- Stormwater pollution permit monitoring
- Citizen science water quality monitoring
- Targeted toxic pollution prevention education campaigns, such as toxic chemicals down drain in home, boaters, septic tanks, lawn and garden, etc.

Responsible Parties: The program management team, Howard Page and Rose Johnson, will put together a committee to design the Water Quality Education and Leadership Development program. Steps staff will provide administrative support for the organizing team meetings, coordinating with team to create and/or print training documents and resources, and planning for location and food for the training. The committee will meet several times over the course of two months.

Objective 3: Provide support for the implementation of participants' proposals. Participants will be instructed to use the knowledge they learned throughout the training to identify a particular education campaign or initiative he/she would like to design and implement. Participants can work individually or in small groups to develop their own proposals. Each proposal will then be submitted to Steps selection committee for review. Approved proposals will receive funding to implement plans over the course of the next six to nine months. The group will then reconvene to evaluate the proposals and identify next steps, including fundraising activities for continued work.

Activities:

1. The selection committee will create the criteria for selecting proposals to fund. The criteria will be given to participants before they draft their own proposals.
2. Steps will partner with the NGCLT to manage the implementation of the campaigns and proposals by having regular contact, establishing reporting requirements, and offering additional resources and tools as needed.
4. The project managers will also reconvene the group at the end of the implementation period to evaluate the campaigns and identify next steps.

Responsible Parties: Steps staff will provide administrative and financial support to the program management team as needed throughout the implementation and monitoring of participant programs. Steps staff will be responsible for administering and managing funds for programs/activities. Steps will assure all funding and activities are in compliance with restrictions on use of federal funds 40 CFR 30.27 or 40 CFR 31.22 as applicable and 2CFR Part 230.

V. Organizational Capacity and Programmatic Capability

Steps Coalition has not managed federal funds in the past but has managed programs and agreements similar in size, scope, and relevance to the proposed project and has a history of meeting reporting requirements under these agreements. For example, OxFam America has funded Steps in the past five years for three different projects, Moss Point Campaign for Safe and Healthy Community, South MS Works, and MS Jobs First Law Scorecard project. The amount funded for each of these projects range from \$20,000 to \$80,000 for one year and involved engaging the local community in various program related activities, coordinating with subcontracting organizations, and quarterly reporting requirements from OxFam America. Steps has successfully implemented proposed activities and achieved projected outcomes and deliverables. It is for this reason, funders like OxFam America, continue to fund our projects over the years.

Steps has programmatic capability to appropriately manage, expend, and account for the federal funds for this project. Steps will use our existing internal controls to track invoices, accounts payable and accounts receivable for the EPA funding. Steps Grant Manager receives and approves all invoices making sure they are applicable and meet the requirements for the project. Invoices are given to the Executive Director for approval prior to getting passed to the Bookkeeper who tracks the expenses and income in Quickbooks and prepares all checks. Checks are then given to the Executive Director for signature and mailing. If checks are over an established amount they must then have a second signature of the Board of Directors Chair. Our organizational auditor and Board of Directors have approved this internal control accounting process. Steps has an external financial audit completed each year. The Grants Manager, Executive Director, and Bookkeeper are also all trained in the internal accounting process and act as a check and balance system to make sure all process are performed properly. All three staff persons involved in the invoices, AP/AR process have an extensive background in non-profit accounting regarding grant funding.

Steps also has the organizing capacity to effectively manage the program and accomplish the proposed goals. Steps' current partnerships include the Port Campaign Coalition, Racial Equity Initiative, and the Mississippi Collaborative. For each of these working groups, Steps manages the partnerships by convening members, providing administrative and organizing support to the group as a whole, and serves as a member of the coalition, engaged in activities that seek to achieve the collective goals and objectives of the partnership. Steps' role in the proposed project will be similar to that of our other partnerships. Steps will convene stakeholders for the selection and program development committees, establish action plans and working agreements that reflect the program goals,

objectives, and activities outlined in the project description and co-manage the implementation of participant proposals with the NGCLT.

Steps is confident we will be able to bring together a diverse and knowledgeable group of individuals to develop a strong and effective program. We have relationships with the local community, scientific experts, local officials, and state agencies. In addition, the EPA and other environmental organizations have a wealth of information that will be utilized in the development of the program. Much of the information is already available and does not need to be reinvented. Steps also has experience conducting trainings within the community. Some examples include Steps Ambassadors Youth Leadership Development Program, Civic Engagement Lunch and Learn Series, and NeighborWorks Training. Each of these trainings provide the individuals with knowledge, skills, and resources they need to increase their capacity to be more effective leaders and organizers in their respective communities.

Steps will also put in place standards to ensure the selection process for participants is objective and results in a group of local residents with the desire and commitment to serve their communities. Steps is looking for individuals that have past experience serving the community, an interest in program goals and objectives, and would benefit from the leadership development training and experience. Steps' Executive Director, Roberta Avila, will lead the selection committee. Roberta has served on selection committee for the Gulf Guardian Fellowship and thus, has the skills and experience necessary to lead the development of application and criteria that will serve the fore-mentioned objectives.

VI. Qualifications of the Principal Investigator or Project Manager

The Project Management team will include Step Coalition's Community Organizer, Howard Page, and NGCLT Executive Director, Rose Johnson. Both Howard and Rose have a strong connection and stake in preserving and strengthening the quality of life in North Gulfport communities. Howard and Rose have a long history of working together. They have worked on environmental justice issues in Gulfport and along the Mississippi Gulf Coast for over 15 years. They have complimentary skills sets, and together make up the perfect team to effectively ensure the success of the program and support the community driven activities throughout the program and into the future.

Howard Page is originally from Gulfport Mississippi. Howard attended the University of Southern Mississippi and received a Bachelors Degree in Finance in 1990. Howard then worked in Washington D.C. at the Department of Transportation in the Office of the Secretary of Transportation for ten years as a Special Assistant.

In 2000 Howard returned to Gulfport and worked as a photographer. Howard volunteered in the Mississippi State Chapter of the Sierra Club and was Chapter Chair in 2003. Howard worked with Mrs. Rose Johnson, to defeat a proposed wetland fill by developer Butch Ward. This campaign focused on the Environmental Justice harms of the project. Howard was a founding Board Member of the North Gulfport Community Land Trust (NGCLT). In 2003 Howard worked with Mrs. Frances Fredericks of the North Gulfport Civic Club to defeat a large sand mining operation proposed to be located in North Gulfport. He is currently a

member of the Gulfport Branch of the NAACP. He serves on the Executive Committee and was awarded the Drum Major for Justice award by in the NAACP in 2003.

Howard has worked since 2010 as a Community Organizer for the Steps Coalition. Howard has worked on many environmental justice issues on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. He has been the campaign organizer for the Campaign for a Safe and Healthy Port since 2010 and was instrumental in organizing the PCC. Howard also works to assist citizens who live next to port of Pascagoula to address environmental issues. These include air pollution such as sulfuric acid mist and grinding materials from ship builders. Howard works to assist citizens on the Gulf Coast in dealing with the affects of the BP disaster and engaging them to work on the projects for the RESTORE Act.

Rose Johnson was born, raised, and resides in North Gulfport. She grew up in a community where “a village raised a child.” Rose has been a community activist for decades, fighting environmental racism and environmental justice issues throughout Mississippi. She has battled and halted the filling of many nearby wetlands; a process that inherently causes flooding in downstream communities like North Gulfport and Turkey Creek. After halting the fill of a 524 acre wetland fill, she was soon approached by the MS Chapter Sierra Club to become its first African American Chair and the first African American to serve on the state Sierra Club Executive Committee.

Her work with Sierra Club includes working on a campaign stop Mississippi Power Company rate increase unless it added more pollution control to the coal-fired power plant in Gulfport, Plant Watson. She also battled a new nuclear power plant proposed for Port Gibson, MS, and worked tirelessly to help the many families affected by illness and death from pollution from the DuPont DeLisle Chemical Plant.

She also worked to help advocate green rebuilding of the Mississippi Gulf Coast after hurricane Katrina. She decided to take the fight to another level and created the North Gulfport Community Land Trust (NGCLT) in an effort to further preserve her community. Some of the Land Trust accomplishments include 1) the opening of an education center; 2) local community garden; 3) acquisition of two astonishing beautiful historic homes; 4) the first community Kaboom Playground and; 5) a community mural of President Barack Obama and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The NGCLT strives to provide decent permanently affordable housing, address education issues, and to fight for environmental justice issues that continue to harm poor communities. Its vision is to create a support system for community members by providing necessary resources to improve their lives and surroundings. Its goal is to protect the environment that has protected them for centuries and regain the pride once had as a community and as a people.

VII. Past Performance in Reporting on Outputs and Outcomes

Each of the funders listed below provided Steps with their own process and requirement for documenting and reporting the progress of the project. All of the grants were funded for one year unless noted. Also for each of the 5 grants, except Oxfam America, Steps was

required to submit a contract and financial and narrative report at the end of the project. Oxfam America requires quarterly reports. Dietel, APIAHF, and Oxfam America have continued to support Steps work with renewed funding.

Grant Number	Title of Project	Amount of Funding	Funding Agency	Point of Contact
None	Port Campaign	\$90K	Anonymous Donor through Dietel Partnerships	Kathryn Treanor
None	Moss Point Campaign for a Safe and Healthy Community	\$20K	Oxfam America	Rosa Herrin
None	Plan for Opportunity	\$30K	Sub contract of EPA funding through Gulf Regional Planning Commission	Elaine Wilkenson
None	Bayou Casotte	\$4K	Patagonia	Paul Hendricks
None	Racial Equity Initiative	\$120K (18 months)	Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF)	Tau Ve'et

VIII. Quality Assurance Project Plan

Steps will likely need to submit a quality assurance project plan. One or more of the potential activities funded as part of the Water Quality Education and Leadership Development program may involve one or more of the activities listed in Appendix I. In the event a proposal that includes one of these activities is approved, Steps will be prepared to partner with an expert to monitor the quality assurance of the project. The selection committee will use the Appendix I checklist to ensure any approved projects that need a QAPP has one.